

# Executive Summary

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## COORDINATION OF ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMS

In Connecticut and across the country, adult literacy is a significant issue, with serious social and economic development implications. In April 2006, at the request of the legislature's higher education and employment advancement committee, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee undertook a study of state programs aimed at improving the literacy levels of adults.

The study's primary purpose was to determine how well publicly funded literacy services for adults with academic skills below the high school level and/or limited English proficiency are coordinated. The committee review focused on assessing: the adequacy of the current service delivery system; consistency of standards and opportunities; accountability for outcomes; and the ability of the existing system to meet adult literacy needs now and in the future.

The program review study pointed out the literacy problem facing Connecticut and the nation is not the inability to read or write at all, or illiteracy in the traditional sense. Instead, today's challenge is low skill levels and a lack of the competencies necessary for success in the new, knowledge-based economy. At present, most family-supporting jobs, particularly in the Connecticut, require at least a high school diploma; adults will need increasingly higher reading, writing, math, and technology skill levels to function effectively at work, in the family and in their communities.

At the same time, the main sources of new workers, particularly in the Northeast, will be immigrants, disadvantaged youth, and nontraditional employee groups such as person with disabilities or former public assistance recipients. These are populations that tend to have limited literacy skills and/or English proficiency and little or no computer experience.

State-supported programs aimed at improving the basic academic and English language skills of adults are critical for maintaining a competitive, qualified workforce. Just as important, effective adult literacy programs will remain a major way to improve the ability of individuals to be self-sufficient and active citizens, as well as parents who can help their children succeed in school.

There are a number of adult literacy providers as well as a range of programs in the state, including but not limited to: local school district adult education courses; basic skills instruction provided in the workplace; remedial education classes at community colleges; and family literacy services as well as one-on-one tutoring offered by public libraries, volunteer organizations, and community-based agencies. The best available estimates, however, show only a small fraction of adults in need of improved literacy skills and/or English language instruction are being served by state programs.

The program review committee found there is significant unmet need for adult literacy services, both basic education and English as a Second Language (ESL), in the state. Effective coordination among the many and varied providers is lacking. There are gaps as well as overlaps in

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service delivery, inequities in access to opportunities for instruction, and barriers to collaboration and shared resources. The current capacity of adult literacy programs in Connecticut is checked by funding levels that have stayed essentially the same over the last ten years. Competition for limited public resources contributes to unmet demand as well as fragmented service delivery.

Moreover, a mechanism to promote a systematic, strategic approach to providing services that meet identified needs is absent at the state level. There is no single state entity in charge of overseeing or acting as a “champion” for adult literacy services. In addition, there is no central source of good information on who needs what services, who is being served, and who is providing what services at what locations and times.

To address these problems, the committee developed a set of recommendations intended to enable the state systems with key roles in adult literacy -- adult education, workforce investment, and regional community colleges -- to: 1) better coordinate their activities; and 2) collaborate more effectively with the many other entities involved in basic skills and ESL instruction. Among these potential partners are: public libraries; the K-12 education system and the state’s secondary vocational schools; public and private postsecondary institutions; unions as well as businesses; and a wide variety of nonprofit, community-based organizations, including faith-based agencies.

The main purpose of the committee’s proposals, which are listed below, is to establish a state-level structure that can provide leadership, forge partnerships, and prioritize and direct the allocation of limited resources. The goal is a cost-effective service delivery system that produces literate adults, ready for the workforce, family and community obligations, and life-long learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Clear Roles and Responsibilities**

**To promote effective coordination of adult literacy programs, the program review committee recommends:**

**1) Adoption of a vision and mission statement that clarifies the purpose of adult literacy programs and services in Connecticut, emphasizing the goals of helping adults develop the literacy skills they need to function as productive citizens in work, family, and community environments.**

**2) Development of a three-year strategic plan that defines roles, identifies priorities, and directs funding for an adult literacy service system in Connecticut. Among the specific areas addressed by the plan shall be the following:**

- a) Leadership, support, and service delivery roles of all system components, examining in particular:
  - i) governance responsibility for adult education;****

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- ii) ways to promote regionalized service delivery and partnerships; and
    - iii) system “infrastructure” needs (resources and support for overall administration, management, research, and coordination).
  - b) Priorities for services, including:
    - i) intensity of available programs (quality versus quantity of instruction);
    - ii) access (improving outreach) and retention (improving learner persistence); and
    - iii) target populations.
  - c) Analysis of funding requirements, identifying at a minimum:
    - i) estimated resources needed to implement plan goals and objectives;
    - ii) current sources of funding and possibilities for reallocation; and
    - iii) potential alternative and new sources of funding sources.
  - d) The plan shall be developed every three years by the adult literacy leadership board recommended below. The board shall review the implementation status of the plan and make any necessary revisions annually. The board shall designate regional planning workgroups consisting of representatives of adult literacy stakeholders to assist in developing and reviewing the state strategic plan for adult literacy.
- 3) Establishment of an adult literacy leadership board consisting of nine voting members appointed by the governor and the legislature. The governor shall appoint five members including the chairperson. The speaker of the House of Representatives, the president pro tempore of the Senate, and the minority leaders of the House of Representatives and the Senate shall each appoint one member.
- a) The voting members shall be representatives of the key stakeholders in the adult literacy system including but not limited to: public and private adult literacy service providers, such as local and regional adult education programs, community colleges, volunteer literacy organizations, and community-based organizations experienced in adult literacy programs; public libraries; adult literacy advocates; businesses with employees in need of improved basic skills and English language proficiency; organized labor; and regional workforce investment boards.
  - b) The term of office of the members shall be for four years. The board may create officers other than the chairperson as it deems necessary from among its members. All actions of the board shall require the affirmative vote of at least five voting members serving on the board, which number shall constitute a quorum.
  - c) The commissioners of correction, education, higher education, economic and community development, labor, and social services, the director of the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, and the secretary of the Office of Policy and

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Management, or their designees, shall serve as nonvoting, ex officio members of the board.

**d) The board shall:**

- i) develop the vision and mission statement and strategic plan recommended above by July 1, 2008;**
- ii) submit recommendations to the governor and legislature for sources and levels of funding to meet the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan each year;**
- iii) establish performance measures for the adult literacy system and use them to track progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plan; and**
- iv) report to legislature and the governor each year by July 1 beginning in 2008 on progress made in developing and subsequently implementing the strategic plan, based on the established performance measures.**

**e) The board shall also be responsible for developing and maintaining centralized system information and for promoting coordination through regional planning, community partnerships for service delivery, and mechanisms for sharing resources, as discussed below.**

**f) The board may call upon state agencies and offices, including but not limited to the departments of education, higher education, labor, economic and community development, and social services, the workforce competitiveness office and the board of trustees for the community colleges for information, reports, and assistance as it may need to carry out its duties.**

**g) The board shall be scheduled to terminate five years from its effective date unless reauthorized by the General Assembly. During the year prior to automatic termination, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee shall conduct a sunset review and report its findings and recommendations regarding continuation, modification, or termination of the board for consideration by the General Assembly during the next regular legislative session.**

## **Centralized Information**

**4) The program review committee recommends that under the direction of the adult literacy leadership board:**

- a) a statewide automated inventory of adult literacy services that can be accessed by the public online, and includes a description of the type of service, the time and**

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- place it is offered, and any eligibility requirements or fees, be established and maintained;
- b) all adult literacy service providers be required to maintain waiting lists and report that information in accordance with standards developed by the board; and
  - c) state agencies with automated information systems containing data related to adult literacy services work together to overcome the restrictions that impede the sharing of program data for research purposes and develop ways of using their systems to track individual progress and service outcomes.
  - d) The committee also recommends a state “report card” on the status of adult literacy in Connecticut be prepared and presented as part of the board’s annual report recommended earlier. The adult literacy report card should include, for each major component of the adult literacy system (e.g., adult education, family literacy, workplace literacy, developmental education): a description of funding levels and sources; numbers and demographics of the individuals served, and performance measures for key adult literacy outcomes such as learning gains, program/credential completion, success in employment or postsecondary education/training, and indicators of community participation (e.g., attain citizenship, voting, attending parent-teacher conferences, etc.).
  - e) The program review committee further recommends at least two full-time education consultant positions be added to the adult education unit of the State Department of Education to provide sufficient capacity to collect and analyze information on available services and program outcomes and to carry out research on adult education program effectiveness and best practices. As part of its strategic planning responsibilities, the leadership board should also determine whether additional staffing is needed at the state level by other systems with adult literacy responsibilities, including public libraries, to carry out these functions.

## Shared Resources

5) The program review committee recommends that the board, through its strategic planning process:

- a) establish that collaboration and community partnerships are the preferred way of delivering adult literacy services and identify ways to modify program requirements to promote shared funding and funding flexibility; and
- b) develop funding policies that provide a) incentives for community partnerships of adult literacy providers and regionalized service delivery and b) financial support for regional collaboration and community planning.

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- c) **In addition, it is recommended that the legislature, with the advice of the adult literacy leadership board, establish a new funding source for adult education and other adult literacy program providers that provides state bonus grants for good performance outcomes, including but not limited to, effective collaboration and coordinated funding and service delivery. The board should also develop a policy for providing multi-year funding to programs with records of good performance.**